

# The Harvest of Gold and Death In the Moonshine Belt

Mountaineers, Forgetting Long Standing Feuds, Unite in "Bootleg" Cause to Fight "Revenuers" and Circumvent Prohibition.  
So Far Hundreds on Each Side Slain



Just after the raid—A still, far in the mountains, completely camouflaged by the canopy of trees overhead.



A score of stills brought in from the foot-hills and piled in the jail at Bristol, Va. A Deputy Sheriff on guard, fearing a rush from the angry moonshiners.

Mountaineers and the well hooped barrels used to store the moonshine pending its shipment. This scene was photographed just after the revenue officers came.



Below—Almost a distillery—A complete plant for the manufacture of 'moonshine' hidden in the mountains fifty miles from the railway.



A remarkable series of photographs, especially procured for this page, showing better than words just what is going on in the moonshine belt

MOONSHINE has replaced romance along the trail of The Lonesome Pine.

One of the most amazing melodramas in which the Federal Government ever has played a part is being enacted in the fastnesses of the Virginia, Tennessee and Kentucky Mountains.

An almost impenetrable wall of secrecy has surrounded the famous "moonshine" belt since the Government authorities entered into the great drama being played on that rugged stage—and only now is it possible to describe a situation that is startling.

Ten thousand illicit stills in daily operation. Three hundred thousand gallons of raw "moonshine" whisky being made and marketed every week—despite the earnest and tragic efforts of the "revenuers" to halt the flow and dam its source.

Twelve millions of gallons, estimated, of this white whisky have flowed into the hands of distributors during the last twelve months.

Thirty thousand men, women and children, engaged in the operation of these hidden mountain stills—some families operating many stills.

Ten thousand arrests within a year—and little progress as yet made toward lessening the output.

Nearly two hundred moonshiners and officers slain in pitched battles during the last twelve months.

Three hundred "revenuers" hiding along the "trails" and fifteen hundred deputy sheriffs combing the mountain sides or guarding the paths that lead into the villages.

This is just a glimpse behind that wall of secrecy which surrounds the "moonshine belt" just behind the wall—with the moonshine trails open, the mystery that has enveloped the source of the nation's new made and seemingly plentiful illegal whisky is solved.

The advent of prohibition proved a boon to the mountaineer population of Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky and North Carolina. It solved the economic problem of the "white trash" and gave steady, if precarious employment, to thousands of sturdy mountaineers who never did an honest day's work in their lives.

For the business of moonshining is no longer a matter of private enterprise, but has for the most part been taken over by shrewd business men who were quick to seize upon the opportunities of illicit liquor manufacture in a section where natural advantages were all in favor of the operator.

In the pre-prohibition days moonshine whisky had little commercial value. It could not be sold outside of the mountain sections, and was often made merely for home consumption. The Kentucky moonshiner snapped his fingers at the Volstead act. He had always made his own whisky and sold a little of it, and he had never paid a revenue tax. He could outwit the Government agents, as he had always done, so he didn't worry.

## Whisky Prices Soaring With Prohibition.

Then the price of genuine whisky began to rise. It became more and more difficult to procure the "real goods" throughout the country, and source after source was cut off by alert agents who were "citywise" and aided by an elaborate system of espionage, were able to ferret out the brewers and distillers of the large cities. Importations also began to diminish.

Suddenly a market opened for the mountain operator. First the demand came from the small towns at the foot of the ridges over which the wisps of smoke from the moonshiners' kettles hung like draperies in the morning air—from the small, somewhat unscrupulous saloonkeeper who, deprived of his former source, was now seeking for anything "with a kick in it." Then later from the larger distributing centers where men of means had entered into the business of purveying liquor to the big cities caught in the path of the Great Drought.

The moonshiner then realized the commercial possibilities possessed by the modest operations of himself and his family that had been regarded heretofore as merely the inalienable right of the mountain clan about which had grown a romantic tradition. Almost overnight there grew a tremendous interest in the rugged mountain folk by persons living in the seclusion of distant cities who knew them only as the stalwart heroes of the family feuds of romantic fiction. In the imagination of the bootlegger the mountain region loomed up as one vast distillery of illicit "wet goods."

The mountain trails began swarming with bootleg agents, willing to enter into a contract at almost any price for a stipulated quantity of corn liquor during a specified period. As it comes from the still, corn liquor is white, clear and to those unaccustomed to its taste, has a harsh, disagreeable taste with considerable scorching proclivities. The mountaineers, however, prefer it to any other form of intoxicant. As it is sold in the Western cities, it looks like genuine whisky, having been blended with coloring matter, and sometimes if it is cleverly flavored and camouflaged, it tastes like whisky.

Anybody who has ever "tossed off a dram" of it knows that it is one of the "headiest" intoxicants ever concocted. The name the mountaineers give it—"White Lightning"—is as expressive as anything that could be said. It is hot. A few years ago a story went the rounds of the Tennessee mountains which pleased the mountaineers mightily. It was that a stranger had come up into the hills to a party in one of the shacks where a moonshining mountaineer and his sons and daughters made their home. When refreshment time came and the unctuous, oily, white liquor was being passed around in a tin dipper, the stranger from the valley protested that he had never taken a drink. But he was urged, and so after persuasion from all quarters he finally tilted the dipper and gulped quickly. Then he

sputtered; then he fled from the house as fast as his legs would carry him. The mountain folk saw no reason why he should not flee if he felt so inclined, and they displayed only mild curiosity at first; but a half hour passed with the stranger unreturned. Two of the sons of the host thought it the better part of hospitality to go out and seek their guest. They found him at the watering trough, and by the bright moonlight they could see him hurriedly dash his head into the cold water, then stand upright, then suddenly dash his head into the trough again. They went over to him and asked what the trouble was.

"Wal," was the reply, "I've got right smart of a cold, and every time I cough that liquor sets my whiskers afire."

That is a malignant exaggeration of course. But it isn't as great a one as it was four years ago.

Before prohibition the liquor was hot enough, but now it is hotter. In their new commercialism the moonshiners have lost much of their pride in their manufacture. They are unscrupulous now. Once moonshining was an inalienable right; now it is purely and simply a business. Anything to hasten the influx of money to the mountains is practiced, heedless of the consequences to others. Many methods are employed by moonshiners just getting into the game which are utterly unethical according to the old traditional standards which governed the moonshiners before the Volstead law was effective. Then it was held a traditional liberty. Now it has no such moral foundation. Concentrated lye and other foreign matter is often put into the new liquor or the mash to hasten its fermentation. The result is that deaths from drinking moonshine liquor are not infrequent now, whereas before this situation arose there was no immediate fatality connected with it unless also connected with long bore rifles and pistols.

## Ten Thousand Stills Supplying Moonshine.

The ten thousand stills that are daily contributing their small rivulets of liquor that converge into the vast flood of millions of gallons that pour into the Western States every week prove the wisdom of the bootleg kings in exploiting the moonshine belt as one of the great untapped sources of liquor in the country.

The mountain moonshiner has every advantage over his city cousin. He is as familiar with every step in the operation of distilling liquor as he is with the stock of his rifle. All the knowledge of his progenitors who have been distilling corn juice ever since the mountains were settled is his own by heredity. He has stood by while his father, in the dead of night with the moon shining overhead, bent over the vat and tested the liquid as it bubbled over the edge, and he is wise in the ways of evasion or defense.

Moreover, he is fearless, shrewd, steeped in mountain lore and possessing a total disregard for the authority of law. They are an independent clan, these mountaineers, who living an isolated existence have made their own laws and brook no interference. It is the boast of many a clan that none of their members would ever be lodged in a jail, and there are innumerable instances of cases where a clan leader, surrounded and with no chance of escape, has put a bullet through his head rather than submit to capture.

Now that prohibition has come along and he has become a commercialized moonshiner, the mountaineer is losing some of his old time bravado. Life was none too pleasant at best in the older days, but now that he has tasted the sweets of an ever-increasing prosperity there is more of a tendency to avoid trouble than to seek it, as was primarily the case heretofore.

The moonshiner still slings a rifle and can pick off a revenuer at 300 yards with deadly accuracy, but he no longer shoots for the sport of the thing. In at least half the cases when the Government agents locate a still it is because "somebody told" and it has become more and more the policy to shoot the "informer" than to get even with the revenue agents.

On the other hand stills have become larger since prohibition and the operations are on a much more costly scale, and where Government agents are upon the trail of one of these super-stills there is likely to be a deadly battle with heavy casualties on each side. The warfare waged by the Government and the counter-offensive of the moonshiners has cost 200 lives within the last twelve months, about equally divided between mountaineers and agents.

Most of the agents are mountain men (generally, however, transferred from their habitual localities) and many a reformed moonshiner has gone over to the Government service to fight a deadly war upon his former colleagues.

The great game that is being played in the mountains of the moonshine belt has been shrouded in secrecy. Men are daily laying down their lives in defiance of the law or in the enforcement of it, and little is heard of the sacrifice. Killings are common occurrences in the mountains of the moonshine belt and feuds are ever on the point of fresh outbreak.

## "Business" Only Cause for Mountain Feuds.

There is but one source for a feud in the mountains now. There was a time when feuds began because of wrongs or slights, real or fancied, but now the explanation for practically every feud's beginning is "business." Said business being moonshining. Often it results from the suspicion that a member of a neighboring or relative family has informed the revenuers. On occasions it is nothing more than business rivalry.

The battles in the hills—feuds or battles between the armed forces of the law and the sharpshooters of the moonshine guerrillas—are seldom published broadcast. The newspapers of the country seldom print stories of encounters between a score of men on the one side and another score on the other side, with casualties in both armies. But such great skirmishes and proportionately high casualties are the fact. Many men, famous throughout the mountain districts, admired or hated as still breakers, have given their lives in the effort to maintain the integrity of the Eighteenth Amendment. And many moonshiners have died in battle against the law. Later in the series many cases will be cited and names given.

The methods of distribution call for exposition. Distribution of the liquor is not second in importance to its manufacture. These are the two main phases of the moonshine situation, and it is through the arm of distribution that the officials might quite possibly find the solution. If the mountain folk could not get their product out of the mountains, manufacture of it would be worse than futile. In their dales and crevices and hiding places they are safe to operate their stills. Until some great and high moral force seizes hold on the minds of the mountaineers nothing can stop their moonshining. It is too great a task to demand of the law. But the distribution phase offers a foothold to the officials. By apprehending the distributors—the smugglers who transport the liquor down the mountain roads to the "bootleggers" in the towns and cities—the flow of liquor might be stopped at its source.